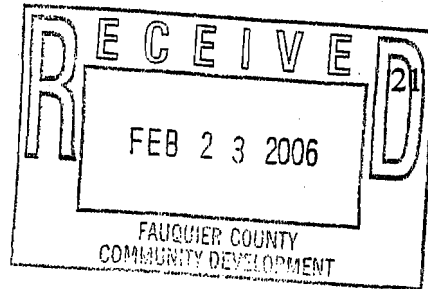




CITIZENS FOR FAUQUIER COUNTY

Post Office Box 3486 ♦ Warrenton VA 20188 ♦ www.citizensforfauquier.org

Ray Graham, Chairman
Fauquier County Board of Supervisors
40 Culpeper Street
Warrenton, VA 20186



21 February, 2006

Dear Chairman Graham,

Citizens for Fauquier County (CFFC) applauds the Board of Supervisors and the School Board in choosing an appropriate, safe and unique site for the third high school. We have attended work sessions regarding the proposed site and understand the need for haste in proceeding with the permitting process.

It is apparent that with the new Route 602 site, Fauquier County has the capability and potential to become a leader in environmental education and a regional model of resource conservation. Kettle Run and the small creeks running into it, the floodplain, the wetlands, the rookery and the extensive hardwood forest all combine into a network of heretofore undisturbed ecological bounty. The opportunity for on-site active and passive science education is not only a very exciting possibility, it is a palpable prospect; there are local nonprofit organizations specializing in natural resource conservation education which are able and eager to partner with the school system in such an effort.

In Chapter 6 of the Comprehensive Plan, the New Baltimore Service District Plan outlines school site guidelines, one of which is that such a site "should not include major floodplain, drainage ways nor major utility easements." We suggest that the County 'trade' the qualification in this clause for the promise to honor and protect the natural resources bisecting the new Route 602 site. The Plan also suggests that "school locations should be collocated with County parks where practicable...." The wetlands area and southern part of the site present a perfect opportunity for such a collocation, devoted to environmental education and enjoyment.

While Great Blue Herons are not a threatened or endangered species, they are a magnificent bird and easily disturbed. As far as we can tell, there is only one other heron rookery in the county. According to the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, activity and noise within 500 feet of their habitat is likely to displace them, and such disturbance within a quarter-mile during nesting season is likely to discourage the birds from building nests or raising young. Your staff report states that "No special management provisions are required..." This is true, however a buffer is *recommended*, and it would be sad irony if the school system intentionally (through construction within the 1320-ft. radius during nesting season) displaced these charismatic birds.

As you are undoubtedly aware, wetlands are some of the most biologically productive natural ecosystems in the world. Once considered wasteland, wetlands are now recognized as providing important services such as protecting and improving water quality, providing fish and wildlife habitats, storing floodwaters, and maintaining surface water flow during dry periods. In fact, up

to one-half of North American bird species nest or feed in wetlands, and they are home to 31 per cent of our plant species.

Uncontained, unfiltered, or polluted runoff can easily impact the integrity of the creek, wetlands and associated wildlife beyond repair. Low impact development (LID) stormwater management practices should be *required*; in fact this site could become a model of LID best management practices for the region. Reducing runoff by minimizing rooftops and impervious surfaces could dramatically reduce dangerous runoff into Kettle Run. Special care should be taken as well during and after construction to minimize and contain chemicals used in the establishment and maintenance of sports fields.

CFFC has had water samples taken of Kettle Run for chemical and macroinvertebrate baseline data, which show a healthy, sustainable aquatic ecosystem. Hopefully the County or the School Board will continue to monitor the water quality through the construction process to ensure that there is no impairment of the wetlands and creek. Subsequent to the opening of the high school, biology or ecology classes would seem a natural, and eager, participant in continued monitoring initiatives.

A formidable group of our fellow citizens has been meeting to consider the consequences of the proposed site's development. The group includes educators, biologists, environmentalists as well as motivated parents. We are seriously concerned about the effects construction and the high school itself will have on the rookery and the wetlands, and have developed a list of reasonable recommendations we feel that the School Board should consider carefully before beginning any disturbance of the site. We also encourage the Planning Commission to consider these recommendations closely and incorporate some of the specifics into conditions for the special exception.

This is an opportunity for Fauquier County to take the lead in environmental design and consciousness. This is an opportunity for the School Board to practice what it teaches throughout the science curriculum, and an opportunity as well for the County to stand up for the natural resources esteemed by the residents of Fauquier County.

This letter is also being sent to all members of the School Board and Planning Commission. I would appreciate your own thinking about these recommendations and, as always, thank you for your consideration and concern for Fauquier's natural resources.

Sincerely,

Mimi Moore, Chair
Environmental Resources Committee

Cc: Board of Supervisors
School Board
Planning Commission
Paul McCulla
Rick Carr\

Att: Recommendations



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FAUQUIER COUNTY PROPOSED HIGH SCHOOL SITE LUNCEFORD PROPERTY RT. 602 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Route 602 proposed high school location is an appropriate, safe and unique site encompassing extensive natural resources. The heron rookery (one of only two in the county), the extensive wetlands, the floodplain and the mature hardwood forest are important natural resources. The County and the School Board should take this opportunity to show environmental concern and sensitivity in designing the infrastructure on this site. The first priority should be to minimize pressure on the heron rookery during nesting season in the hopes that we may continue to host these magnificent birds. The wetlands are the site's most important resource, and one which is easily impacted through construction and subsequent stormwater runoff and sports field maintenance.

1. The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) has recommended a 500-foot natural, forested buffer around the rookery. This Buffer should be strictly enforced. DGIF has also recommended a 1,320-foot construction buffer around the rookery during nesting season (March 15 – July 30). This advice should be considered carefully in an effort to honor this habitat rarely found in the Piedmont.
2. This site could become the most important and exciting environmental education resource in the County, if not the region. The School Board has an opportunity to design native landscaping on the school campus, mitigate the effects of construction, and enhance habitat for birds and wildlife already resident on the site. While the Fauquier public school system already has an Outdoor Lab and teaches environmental and natural science courses, this site could become a magnet program in these fields. There are local organizations which are eager to assist in environmental education in their specific areas of expertise.
3. An aggressive Low Impact Development (LID) stormwater management system should be designed into the site plan. Stormwater runoff, during and after construction, will have a major negative impact on the wetlands, and consequently on the rookery. There should be an effort to minimize impervious surfaces, such as roofs, parking lots, roads, and sidewalks.
4. Any bus parking and maintenance area should be carefully designed and maintained to minimize pollution and toxic run-off.
5. The School Board and BOS may choose to consider an advisory committee to interact with the Boards and the architects and builders during planning and construction. This committee might consist of planners, architects, landscape architects, builders, soil scientists, naturalists, biologists, state wildlife and wetland agencies, neighbors and parents.
6. The land on the south side of the wetlands is not proposed for any development and will be owned by the County rather than the school system. We suggest that the County put this land in perpetual conservation easement and use this part of the site for a public park.